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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0785
INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
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RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 3758
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 1576
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 1443
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL PRIORITY 2012
RHMFIUU/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE PRIORITY 2511
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY

UNCLAS ASHGABAT 000604

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [SOCI](#) [RS](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: RUSSIAN-SPONSORED VICTORY DAY
CELEBRATION BRINGS OUT TURKMEN VETERANS

1. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

2. (SBU) SUMMARY: The Russian embassy hosted the annual dinner/reception for the dwindling Red Army veteran community. While the event celebrated the end of the Great Patriotic War and the end of the Fascist threat, it was understandably interwoven with strong USSR patriotic themes that made it feel as if the Soviet Union were the entity being honored. Unfortunately, those from Turkmenistan who helped the Red Army fight and win over 60 years ago are now a largely forgotten demographic. Nevertheless, the reception offered a chance for the ever-dwindling number of veterans to relive their glory days. END SUMMARY.

3. (SBU) In honor of Victory Day, when the former Soviet states commemorate the defeat of Fascism in World War Two, the Russian embassy hosted a large dinner/reception on May 7 for the aging Soviet veteran community, Western diplomats and former Soviet Union defense attaches. Some 40 elderly men and women, most proudly wearing rows of medals, attended the event, some with family members at their sides.

4. (SBU) The Russian defense attach's office organized the event, which included several hours of dance and song presented by multiple groups of students from the Russian school, as well as poetry recitations. The Turkmen Army Band provided musical accompaniment, which began with the "Internationale" and the Turkmen national anthem, but then performed a variety of old Soviet favorites that soon had folks singing along. The veterans quieted and stood to attention when the Soviet anthem was played, sending a powerful wave of nostalgia through the room.

5. (SBU) Later, as the elderly crowd dove into the heaping platters of food and the cadres of former Soviet attaches initiated a long series of vodka toasts, the children sang well-loved Victory Day songs that every veteran still knew by heart. When a group of very young children crisply recited Konstantin Simonov's most famous Russian Victory Day poem, "Wait for Me," you could hear a pin drop as people around the room quietly dabbed away tears.

6. (SBU) COMMENT: This rapidly diminishing demographic is

not doing well economically. At independence, the new Turkmenistan government assumed responsibility for payment of pensions to war veterans. In January 2006, former President Niyazov drastically cut back pension provisions and established a one million manat monthly pension maximum. Although President Berdimuhandov reversed some of Niyazov's cuts, the one million manat (now worth about \$70 per month) pension maximum still stands, leaving veterans and other elderly far below the poverty line. Few in this fragile population, given its advanced age and the lack of quality medical care, will likely see the longer term benefits of reforms currently underway. Yet the event was a chance for veterans to reconnect with each other and relive their glory days in a fitting way. END COMMENT.
HOAGLAND